

VZCZCXRO5077  
RR RUEHCD RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE  
DE RUEHSK #1022/01 2431041  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 311041Z AUG 05  
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 286  
INFO RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0627  
RUHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN G  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 001022

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SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [PHU](#) [ECON](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: Resuscitating the Soviet Ideological Machine

¶1. (U) Summary: Under Presiden Lukashenko, Belarus has adopted an "official Belrusian ideology," which in many respects is remiiscent of that promulgated under communism. The official ideology is to be taught in schools, univrsities and workplaces, through the media and th Orthodox Church. Belarus' state ideology is basd on Soviet-era ideology, with its praise of a strng central authority, its messianism, and its reliance on external enemies. Despite pervasive skepticism amongst the popultion, the constant repetition of the ideology, a well as Lukashenko's endless propaganda, has covinced many Belarusians that Belarus is thrivingdue to Lukashenko. End Summary.

What is the ideology?  
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¶2. (U) Accordingto Lukashenko, after his election he was forced to take charge of the elaboration of the new system of ideology to build the foundation of Belarusian sovereignty. His campaign program from the 1994 elections became the first manifestation of Belarus' state ideology, stressing patriotism, collectivism, social justice, the high prestige of education, and socially useful work without any financial rewards. Other factors that have been introduced to the ideology are: the necessity of a powerful central authority, strengthening integration with Russia, solidarity of the Slavic peoples, the importance of labor, and social justice.

Why is ideology crucial?  
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¶3. (U) According to the now mandatory Belarusian textbooks on ideology, published in 2004 under order of the president, a society cannot exist without an integral code of ideas, values and standards uniting all of its citizens. A state without ideology cannot live and develop, and cannot withstand internal and external challenges and threats. In a March 2003 speech, Lukashenko said, "Ideology for a state is what the immune system is for a living organism. If the immune system grows weaker, any infection, even the slightest one, turns deadly". He added that the inculcation of an official state-controlled ideology into the country's citizenry was essential to protect Belarus from any possible "infection". In his view, if the government wishes to see Belarus flourish and become a strong, prosperous, sovereign country, it must concentrate on its ideological foundations.

What do ideological officers do?  
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¶4. (U) Every enterprise, school, organization and governmental

entity in Belarus must have an ideological officer, according to the Presidential edict of 20 February 2004 'On improving the ideology work of staffing in the Republic of Belarus'. It is the job of ideological officers to address the issues and hardships people are facing, to write about them in the printed media and to speak about them on TV. Twice a month the officer is to provide ideological instruction to his flock. An ideological officer has to be a well-educated, charismatic person. The officer has to strongly believe in the ideas conveyed to the public and shared within the society. The Presidential Administration created an Ideological Department to control and expand the work of ideological officers throughout the country. In addition, the GOB has tasked local Councils, labor unions and youth groups with propagating the state ideology. This also applies to private businesses. According to a long-time post contact, the GOB recently forced the head of one of the largest car dealerships in Belarus to hire and appoint as his deputy an ideological officer.

Belarus has become a center of the Slavic civilization  
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15. (U) Belarus' official ideology has a messianic, and self-delusional, character. It borrows heavily from the Soviet ethos of, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." It preaches that the Belarusian nation is the only Eastern Slavic country that remains true to such traditional civilized values and ideals. Therefore, it is inevitable that Belarus will become the spiritual leader of Eastern European civilization. According to the ideology, many peoples around the world look upon Belarus as an example of consistent and independent politics. Therefore, Belarus should become a place where people are able to speak up and be free from neoliberal [i.e.- American] terror and persecution.

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Ideology and the economy  
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16. (U) An important facet of Belarus' ideology is the promotion of a "socially oriented economy," with equal opportunities for state and private ownership. The goal is a high level of social security (full employment, growing wages, receipt of pensions) for all citizens.

Ideology and education  
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17. (U) Education plays a significant role in the development and promulgation of the ideology. In September 2003 a new mandatory course, "The Basis of Belarusian Ideology," was introduced to all Belarusian state and private universities. Lukashenko advised rectors of both state and private universities to fire professors and lecturers who oppose government policies or are wavering in their belief regarding the ideology, since they are the ones who transmit ideas to the next generation. All secondary schools must recreate Soviet-era youth organizations to spread the ideology and increase patriotism among youth. According to state ideological propaganda, high quality educational programs are available to more individuals in Belarus than in the rich countries of the West, where some people cannot afford them due to the high tuition and other fees.

Ideology and labor  
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18. (U) Lukashenko's ideological campaign envisions the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions [note: the state-controlled labor behemoth] becoming the core of society, since the BFTU now unites more than 4 million workers. The BFTU is to work to ensure high levels of safety, employment and adequate salaries for Belarusian employees. As the ideology books quote Lukashenko, "Reaching a

man's soul and mind is a great art and hard work." Therefore all enterprises in the country must have a deputy director/officer for ideological instruction.

#### Ideology and health

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¶9. (U) There is nothing more valuable for any person than life and health. Therefore, the government is attempting to consolidate all its efforts to propagate a healthy life-style. Even when it goes against the wishes of the citizens, the ideology directs the government to fight against smoking, drinking, and drug abuse. The President must serve as an example to its people in this regard. [Comment: In this sphere, the government appears to be fighting a losing battle, as health statistics indicate that the Belarusian lifestyle is far from healthy.]

#### Ideology and the media

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¶10. (U) Mass media, including radio, television, and printed media, are the most efficient transmitters of ideology. The Internet is another source of information, but according to the ideological texts, it has become a "garbage can" of conflicting, destructive ideas. The work of all of mass media, regardless of ownership, should be aimed at strengthening ideological penetration of society. The media should not only concentrate on the positive achievements of the government, but also reflect its failures and provide constructive criticism. [Comment: There is little evidence the state media is fulfilling the latter responsibility.] However, since reporters play a key role in forming public opinion, journalism has to be a profession controlled by the government. Every journalist therefore is to be held accountable for the message he conveys to the public.

¶11. (U) Belarusian television is the cornerstone of media policy. In an era of the satellite TV, accessible in every part of the world, the international media is engaged in an information war and ideological competition launched by the Western countries against Slavdom. If Belarus loses this battle, it will be deprived of its sovereignty, national character, the uniqueness of the Belarusian nation, its spiritual core and its moral foundation. Belarusian television has to counter this by providing a positive image of the republic abroad.

#### Ideology and religion

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¶12. (U) Religion and language are critical in the Belarusian ideology. The state church in Belarus is the Belarusian Orthodox Church. Its Metropolitan, who answers to the patriarch in Moscow, regularly praises Lukashenko for his Russophile and pan-Slavic beliefs. Indeed, from time to time Lukashenko describes his state ideology not as Communist, but as Orthodox Christian. He often praises the Belarusian Orthodox Church for opposing "destructive forces," cooperating with the authorities, and contributing to social stability. For its part, the BOC has been granted preferred treatment by most government ministries in a series of bilateral agreements. At the same time, the GOB likes to emphasize the Belarusian tradition of tolerance to all faiths and peoples.

#### Creating obedient people

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¶13. (U) According to the ideology texts, every Belarusian citizen has to be well informed on state policies and the official ideology. Moreover, every Belarusian must feel themselves to be an integral part of the community and the country, who thoughtfully fulfills their civil and professional duties. The ideology stresses obedience to a strong central authority. Dissent should

be kept to a minimum.

Comment

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¶14. (SBU) Even in the official ideology texts, the ideology is very poorly defined. It gives no clear answers to show what Belarus is and where it wants to go. Slogans, such as "a socially oriented market economy" and "a strong and prosperous Belarus", could as well be used by most opponents of the current government. As in the Soviet era, the ideology seems to be best used in dividing the populace between the "productive," those who say they believe in the state ideology, and the "destructive," those who do not. Perhaps Lukashenko's most significant victory with this ideology is his ability to convince so many Belarusians that he is the guarantor of Belarus' independence. Judging from opinion polls and comments from a wide spectrum of Belarusian society, the ideology does resonate within the Belarusian population. For one, it confirms the Belarusians' own image of themselves as tolerant, peaceful, hardworking and orderly. Furthermore, while many Belarusians, especially the young and cynical, might challenge the official ideology, in the absence of alternate points of view they end up believing it. This wide acceptance of government propaganda in turn limits the likelihood the Belarusian people will agitate for democratic reforms.

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